



Time to balance nation's budget

With the federal debt at \$13 trillion and growing, we support a constitutional amendment to require annual balanced budgets.

By *The Denver Post*

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If only Washington had listened to us, we'd all be better off. But isn't that always the case?

Joking aside, in 1995 the Denver Post editorial board went on the record to strongly support the passage of a constitutional balanced budget amendment.

We wrote, "No smokescreen is thick enough to obscure the fact that the total accumulated federal debt is now over \$4.8 trillion and getting rapidly worse."

Since then, reckless spending by both parties has left Americans with an unsustainable \$13 trillion federal debt, which is still getting "rapidly worse."

In 1995, the budget-balancing legislation passed in the House easily but failed, by a single vote, to meet the two-thirds requirement in the Senate. It lost again by one vote in 1997.

In today's political climate, we imagine it won't be any easier to pass. But that doesn't mean

someone shouldn't bring it up.

We support Colorado Republican Congressman Mike Coffman — and his balanced budget caucus — in his efforts to bring a vote on the issue. A small measure of common sense would be welcome in Washington. This year, for instance, Congress won't even officially pass a budget, much less try to balance it.

The Coffman-backed resolution would make it mandatory that total outlays for any fiscal year could not exceed total receipts for that fiscal year, unless three-fifths of each house of Congress decide to go over the limit.

Unlike similar proposals in the 1990s, taxes could be raised with a simple majority, not the much harder to attain supermajority vote. The amendment also would make clear exemptions for emergency spending — the imminent threat of war being the most obvious.

Once enacted, rather than relying on the always-ignored pay-as-you-go regulations that now exist, budgets would be real — regardless of which party is in power.

With fixed constraints on spending, Washington would be impelled to reduce waste to make room for new programs. Most states — and families — already operate under similar constraints. Or Congress could raise taxes to pay for worthy programs.

A balanced budget amendment also would help create stability. It would force party leaders to prioritize earmarks and other areas susceptible to corruption.

The idea will not offer any immediate relief for our deep-rooted fiscal mess. To begin with, even in the best-case scenario, an amendment could only be implemented many years from now. But if we're looking for long-term fixes that will restore healthy and realistic federal spending, we have to get started somewhere.

Or, as we said in 1995, "If the public outrage isn't enough," voters can "elect a Senate that will join in the long and difficult task of pulling American back from bankruptcy."

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